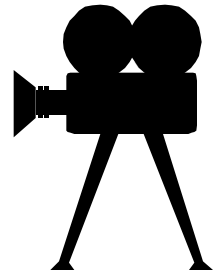


Spotlight on

Major General Larry W. Northington

Initial Observations—Challenges—Goals



Since Gen Northington's arrival he has hit the ground running. I have been trying to interview him all month. I finally made it to his outer office. The phones were ringing off the hook. Two days away from a printing deadline and I'm finally in. Walking into his office I notice a plaque inscribed Teacher—Cheerleader—Coach.

Gen Northington begins by giving some of his initial observations after sitting in the driver's seat for the last sixty days. His first observation—the incredible breadth of the organization. There is no aspect of the Air Force we are not actively engaged in. Second, the talent of the people—their strong analytical and managerial skills. Third, the degree in which we depend on the team work aspect with the broader Air Force. No matter how talented our people are or how hard we work, without integration of our efforts with the rest of the Air Force, we will not be effective. Our relationship must be solid with Air Force Programs, Acquisition, Operations, Personnel, and Logistics communities and our major commands.

He then discusses the challenges which will then translate into goals. The first challenge is one of balance (the needs of today vs the needs of tomorrow). Throughout the military and across DoD, we are always moving toward higher technology. We have made incredible advances in technology since WWII, Korea, Viet Nam, and even Desert Storm. The Air Force enjoys the reputation of being a very highly technical Service. Technology is expensive—it is also a significant enhancer to our war-fighting capability. One could argue technology is a weapon.

“Budget is a tool to push
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But, we have multiple, competing demands. The first piece—modernization—focusing on the future. Leaning toward the next technology needs to be balanced with the needs of today. The second piece—infrastructure—maintaining the needs of today (runways, buildings, family housing). The third piece—readiness—maintaining our current day-to-day operations. The final piece—people. We are in a free market economy. We must attract high quality and well motivated people. To do so we need to make sure we offer them a competitive benefits package—from pay and compensation to a broader issue of quality of life, including OPTEMPO concerns.

We are balancing plates on a four-cornered scale—modernization, infrastructure, readiness, and people. The requirements often exceed resources that are available. There are always going to be trade-offs we have to make.

The second challenge is visibility. By that he means visibility into the budget process. He says budget is a tool to push resources to the war fighter and those who provide critical support to the war fighter. The people we serve have a need to understand the budget and how priorities are established. It's not a financial issue; it's about understanding how resources are transferred from the highest level down to that indi-

vidual who needs those assets in the field. A large portion of the Air Force does not understand how resources are allocated. It is incumbent on us to better educate. This means educating ourselves—inside the Pentagon, major commands, and base level. It also means to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Congress, the Administration, and ultimately to the American people. We need to be able to show exactly what we are buying with our annual allotment. America, what are you getting for your \$70B Air Force? That's much more about opening up and explaining to people what we are about and what we are trying to do more so than the technical aspects of financial management.

Another important issue is the presentation of financial information. In presenting the financial information understandably and at all levels—particularly to our decision makers—we will give a good open disclosure of what the situation is from a financial point of view—the tradeoffs—the costs, benefits, and disadvantages. This enables leadership to make the best decision they possibly can.

Third, we need to avoid surprises—anticipate more. The organization is extremely fast paced, working many issues with short fuses. We need to do this better and become more proactive and less reactive. This is easy to say, but very hard to do. He would like to strap this one on. This gets to the issue of the quality of analysis we're doing. Obviously with more time and thought we could do it better. You can explore more options, put a bit more thought process onto an issue, and perhaps generate better options. It also says we give decision makers more time to make decisions as opposed to short time as they tend to be.

The next challenge, number four, is focus. We have a propensity to focus on what we're not doing—what we didn't fund. We have a tendency to focus on programs we're not buying as opposed to looking at a broader context. That broader context is our level of commitment to, our level of investment in, a particular capability. You can pick one—space, science and technology, fighter aircraft, cargo aircraft, whatever category you'd like to look at. Again we tend to focus on a piece of that program that we are not funding as opposed to the rest of the program that we are funding. He wants us to change that and put in proper context. Is the cup nine-tenths full or one tenth empty? We need to look at full capability as opposed to single individual programs.

Organizational Goals

Gen Northington translates the above four challenges into organizational goals.

- Balance. Improve the issue of balance.
- Visibility. Improve the visibility and the budget process.
- Avoid Surprises. How can we anticipate better?
- Expand the Focus. Is the cup 9/10 full or 1/10 empty?

Enhancers to Goals

- Credibility. Is our analysis thorough, accurate, and timely; is it presented in a straightforward understandable way? Competency!
- Consistency. Decision makers expect us to be able to keep our story straight. If we continue to change our story, we lose credibility and end up causing confusion.
- Impact to the Air Force. We must always run decisions through a filter called "Impact to Mission." What does this do to combat capability? This comes back to the objective of the budget to push tools to the war fighter. Budget decisions must always go through that filter.
- Discipline. We must have follow through. If we've done the analysis right, we're credible; we're consistent in the application of that policy, and we're able to carry through that particular plan.

The interview was interrupted due to higher priorities. I came out of his office believing the plaque I initially saw on his bookcase. He is a teacher we can learn from; a cheerleader to change our outlook; and a coach to help us get there.